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AUTHOR Palmer, William S.
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ABSTRACT

In developing teaching strategies for students who are poor writers but good readers, it is useful to explore the characteristics of good readers and of poor writers, and to consider implications for improving classroom practices. Good readers tend to put into practice four major cognitive strategies when they read: they plan, translate or interpret, reread, and reflect upon and/or evaluate what they read. On the other hand, poor writers make limited use of planning time, limit the reading of texts during their creation, limit reading for revision after text production, and devote little time to reflection or evaluation of the text after production. A basic question to ask is how the positive cognitive strategies that good readers use during reading can be best taught to improve writing performance. Teachers should use current information concerning students' cognitive capacities at different stages and provide related written language experiences; teach the composing process with strategies that make sense to good readers/poor writers (such as beginning with unevaluated writing assignments, presenting sound prewriting activities, and preparing cumulative and sequential writing assignments); have students read their drafts and revisions before peer groups; and encourage students to reflect upon and evaluate their writing. (EL)

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GOOD READERS/POOR WRITERS: SOME IMPLICATIONS FOR CLASSROOM PRACTICES

William S. Palmer

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

INTRODUCTION

In the past five years, much effort has been made to investigate reading and writing relationships. From a variety of research perspectives, from correlational to case studies, researchers have recently been able to delineate and describe three major premises about reading and writing convergences:

(1) Reading and writing are complementary, interactive processes.

(2) Reading and writing when they interface as a text is being created are transactional processes.

(3) Reading and writing are parallel cognitive processes. (Peterson, 1986).

While some studies have explored characteristics of good readers/good writers and poor readers/poor writers, to date we have no studies which explore good readers who are at the same time poor writers. Thus we come to the focus of this paper: Good readers/poor writers: Some implications for improved classroom practices.

With limited research available to date on good readers who are at the same time poor writers, I will present my perspectives on this topic within the following three-pronged approach. First, I will identify and describe some basic characteristics of good readers. Secondly, I will identify and describe some basic characteristics of poor writers. Third and finally, I will suggest

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some implications for improving classroom practices for good readers who are also poor writers.

CHARACTERISTICS OF GOOD READERS

Most good readers are aware of the cognitive strategies they use when they are comprehending texts. Judith Langer (1982), who has reviewed many reading studies, refers to this metacognitive ability of watching oneself read as using a "third eye". In her synthesis statement, Langer says that good readers predict as they read, construct appropriate hypotheses, carry along better questions with them during the act of comprehending, and recognize more quickly when to abandon questions remaining unanswered. These characteristics she identifies are not at all contradictory to Frank Smith's theory (1971) and Ken Goodman's (1970) psycholinguistic model of fluent readers. Nor are they dissimilar to any major degree from those elements within Louise Rosenblatt's (1970) transactional theory of the reading process.

To be much more specific, however, good readers tend to put into practice four major cognitive strategies when they read: (1) they plan, (2) they translate or interpret, (3) they reread, and (4) they reflect upon and/or evaluate what they read. These four findings as characteristics of good readers are grounded in observational, ethnographic, and empirical research. (Peterson, 1986).

I. Planning. For the good reader, planning consists of two broad types of activities knowledge moblization and goal setting. During moblization of knowledge, good readers seem to retrieve knowledge from their long-term memories about (1) the topic (2) writing plans and organizaional strategies, (3) the audience, and (4) the persona. In goal-setting, good readers decide what they want to find out, why they are reading, and how they want to go about the task.

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Respectively, these goal setting decisions have been labelled substative goals (what); intentional goals (why), and procedural goals (how).

II. Translation During Reading. Translation during reading refers to the on-going making of meaning or attempt to make meaning which occurs as readers deal directly with the printed page. During translation, much aligning takes place with good readers. Aligning refers to the process by which readers assume roles with the text as they comprehend.

Some Examples of Aligning

Readers may align themselves with an author by being critical with him or her or sympathetic towards him or her.

Readers may also align themselves attitudinally with a character or a persona or they may identify themselves as members or non-members of the author's intended audience.

Readers may agree or disagree, approve or disapprove, become bored or excited by the content in the text. These characteristics may also be considered indicators of aligning (Ward, 1986).

III. Rereading. Rereading involves the following three characteristics as used by good readers.

A. Review. Good readers review words, sentences, a number of sentences, or the entire text, sometimes recursively until they reach a final, satisfactory interpretation.

B. Revision. During the process of comprehension, good readers often make or consider a number of significant semantic changes.

C. Edit. In the process of changing or considering a change in interpretation, good readers edit what they read in the sense that

they frequently catch mispronunciations, omissions, and surface level decoding mistakes (Tierney and Pearson 1983).

IV. Reflecting and/or Evaluating. Good readers monitor and make value judgments about the product of their comprehension or about a process used during comprehension, or about themselves as a reader or learner (Birnbaum, 1986).

CHARACTERISTICS OF POOR WRITERS

Now consider what poor writers do in direct relation to the four major characteristics as to what good readers do.

I. Poor writers make limited use of planning time. Donald Graves (1983) calls planning "rehearsal time" and has noted that poor writers spend less time pausing to rehearse a mental plan before beginning to write. Kress (1982) observes that poor writers not only spend less time developing plans, but they spend less time considering a wide range of rhetorical choices. Flower and Hayes (1981) note that poor writers appear to have a limited capacity to set their own rhetorical goals. Barby Doughtery (1986) concludes that poor writers have less control over written language in general, and as a result, possess particular difficulty in predicting the rhetorical demands of different academic disciplines and also lack ability to adjust their writing strategies accordingly. Richard Beach and JoAnne Liebman-Kliene (1986) state that poor writers lack ability to infer audience attributes and to use these attributes to assess or monitor their writing. Dorothy Augustine and W. Ross Winterowd (1986) suggest that less capable writers have much difficulty projecting hypothetical responses and questions as a reader of an emerging plan, thereby having problems controlling the direction of

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their potential writing.

II. Poor writers limit the reading of texts during their creation. We assume that when an individual writes, he or she also reads. Tierney and Leys' data (1986) suggest that the quality of writing produced is related to the quality of reading done during writing. Similarly, June Birnbaum (1986) notes that poor writers race through their composing with many ending each draft with disparaging remarks about their own writing. She further notes that many poor writers transcribe illegibly but it is not the illegible writing that makes them not read their writing but the unintelligibility of their text production. And often, the same poor writers are unaware of weak text development until they are asked to read their writing aloud to an audience. Other studies have found that poor writers practice reading during writing only for limited purposes, such as retrieving a word, thought, or phrase, or correcting spelling, punctuation, or usage. (Sternglass, 1986).

III. Limited reading for revision after text production. Poor writers apparently become so enmeshed in the demands of transcription or recording that they do not distance themselves from their writing to pause and evaluate their efforts to create meaning. Poor writers also do less monitoring at the content or text level of language usage. Moreover, poor writers appear less knowledgeable of monitoring strategies to employ in the successful construction of meaning. They make fewer pauses and changes in major turning pauses in their drafts, and although some poor writers do reread, they do not, as a result, make any changes. In addition, poor writers formulate fewer questions and seek few solutions to problems with their evolving texts. Thus, they appear reluctant to

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discover new directions and try alternative methods of presenting content in writing. (Sternglass, 1986).

IV. Poor writers do little reflecting upon and evaluation of text after production. Poor writers do less reflecting upon and evaluation of their own texts than do good writers. The poor writer's limited use of reflection and/or evaluation decreases the ability to extract more information from personal experiences and to further elaborate schemata for use in developing diverse forms and diverse forms and expanded content. (Birnbaum, 1986).

GOOD READERS/POOR WRITERS: SOME IMPLICATIONS FOR IMPROVED CLASSROOM PRACTICES

With good readers who are poor writers, then, there may be no lack in cognitive ability to read and write. However, there may be a breakdown in the cognitive strategies poor writers use in text production in relation to those good readers use effectively during reading comprehension. Thus, we need to consider how those successful reading strategies good readers use can influence their poor writing performance. More specifically, we need to ask how the positive cognitive strategies good readers use during reading can be best taught to improve writing performance.

In a recent article, George Hillocks (1984) defines three modes of teaching composition:

Presentational Mode: The most common mode, and one which emphasizes the teacher as presenter of knowledge about writing.

Naturalistic Mode: Initiated by the National Writing Project, a mode which encourages students to write for other students, to receive comments from one

another, and to revise their drafts in light of both students and the instructor.

Environmental Mode: A mode which places teacher and student more nearly in balance, with the teacher planning activities and selecting materials through which students interact with each other to generate ideas and learn identifiable writing skills.

With the naturalistic mode, Hillocks makes the assumption that teachers make little if any planning for instruction. He states: "The instructor using the naturalistic mode does not plan activities to develop specific strategies of composing." Thus he concludes that the most effective mode for teaching composition is the environmental one, because it brings teacher, student, and materials more nearly into balance, and in effect, takes advantage of all the resources in the classroom.

However, what works in teaching of composition, especially to good readers who are poor writers, is not an either/or choice of instructional modes. A major goal of a sound writing program for good readers/poor writers would have to include a balance of all modes Hillocks identifies, but in particular the naturalistic and environmental modes. The composing process as described by Moffett (1983) and Murray (1982) does not end up as a series of dissected strategies. Rather, these writers urge wise teachers to use current information concerning the cognitive capacities of students at different stages and provide varied written language experiences that will fully develop those capacities while also providing experiences that will begin to move the student toward advanced levels.

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Some Specific Implications

I. Put the composing process into practice with strategies that make sense to good readers/poor writers.

A. Begin with low risk, unevaluated writing assignments, especially in the expressive mode. Emig (1977), Applebee (1981). As Steven Tchudi (1986) also reminds us....."for writing needs, teachers should develop curricula based on the experiential backgrounds of the students themselves." Some such activities could be Peter Elbow's (1981) recommendation and rationale for using freewriting or Ira Progoff's (1982) concept of various journal strategies.

B. Prepare students for writing assignments with sound prewriting activities. Well-planned prewriting strategies "warm-up" or "stretch" the reader's mind before writing, giving good readers/poor writers a chance to deliberate over alternatives rather than just accept the first idea that occurs to them. Some excellent prewriting activities identified and described by Lindemann (1982) are as follows: (1) focused freewriting (2) brainstorming (3) role-playing (4) heuristics and (5) content presentation. In the last prewriting category, lectures by teachers on unfamiliar content can serve as a source of prewriting. However, also what students read and are assign to read influence not only what they write, but how they write (Dixon 1978); (Spivey 1983).

C. Prepare writing assignments which are cumulative and sequential in nature. James Moffett and Mary Jane Wagner (1976) have done a fine job of presenting writing asignments based on communication theory which lead students from the more simple to the more complex, until

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with sustained practice they become multi-model in language mastery. Some activities they suggest are (1) memory writing, (2) observational/ interior monologues, and (3) dialogue/voice writing.

II. Reading Writing While Drafting.

Tierney and Leys (1986) have specifically asked this question: In particular, are we preparing our students to be proficient readers of their own writing? Poor writers, we know, possess limited meta-cognitive awareness and control over writing. How can teachers help students improve while drafting? One such strategy is peer group readings, recommended by Alan Teasley (1984).

Peer Group Reading

Put students in groups of three. Instruct each to bring three copies of a draft to class , one for self and one for each of the other group members. Train each group member to follow these steps:

1. Give each person in your group a copy of your draft.
2. Preface what you like, problems you encountered, and help needed before you read your draft.
3. Read your paper aloud.
4. Peers reading along silently mark your paper as follows:
   (a) + for positive feedback (at least three)
   (b) H for help needed by writer
   (c) any comments anywhere else on paper
5. Group starts with the positive remarks first and proceed to react to a group member's paper when help is needed.
6. Peers return marked copies to each group member.

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7. Proceed with the next group member going through the previous 6 steps.

Group questioning and feedback within this setting helps poor writers become more capable of re-seeing and re-reading. Such verbal interaction also helps poor writers reorganize, rethink, select, and omit written information. Poor writers are also placed in a situation of having an audience other than the teacher. They hear the reader's viewpoints. They learn to read their writing (drafts) and take notes of features and elements questioned and discussed. They learn to respond to questions and to read for alternative choices and arrangement of ideas. In this kind of activity, writers develop a sense of "we-ness." As Deborah Brandt (1986) emphasizes:

> When we begin to treat writers as in some important sense not alone when they write, we can begin to account for many aspects of the phenomena of writing, especially the sense of discovering "we" experiences in writing, the sense we have our own very text developing. We make meaning when we share. When our private understandings meet the air of public discourse, they take on public meanings with which we, participants in that discourse, must contend.

III. Rereading after text production.

Through peer group reading, a poor writer's capacity to monitor his/her own writing first becomes evident when the student begins attempting to volunteer specific comments about ways to plan, draft, and organize content within the evolving text. For help in revision, Beach and Liebman-Kleine maintain that a writer must think like a reader, that is, adopt a reader's perspective. Although the stages of composing are

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recursive, and this characteristic of inferring audience attributes could happen during each stage, Beach and Liebman-Kleine propose audience attribute writing activities for revision that will help writers, especially poor writers, assess their writing.

IV. Reflecting upon and the evaluation of writing.

Birnbaum (1986) urges teachers of poor writers to promote reflective thinking by asking questions that demand high reasoning and predicting skills. This reflectiveness manifests itself in an awareness of more subtle rhetorical problems poor writers are having with written language. Often, after a student's awareness of new and previously untapped ways of using writing, students, especially poor writers, will develop more positive attitudes towards the writing task and their resulting texts.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, research reveals that poor writers have not developed a repertoire of writing strategies nor knowledge as to how these same strategies can vary in use for different purposes and audiences. Research also suggests that the cognitive strategies and schemata we learn by expansive reading may be extended to develop the limited schemata and strategies poor writers possess. Consequently, we teachers must monitor our own classroom behaviors in view of our goals of teaching specific cognitive writing strategies to those individual students who are both good readers and at the same time poor writers. With such appropriate instruction, poor readers, hopefully, will begin to balance cognitive strategies in both reading and writing--to begin to write with a reader's eye and to read with a writer's eye.

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